

Sunday 20

8/20/17

What I am about to say was written last Thursday. So the Charlottesville, Virginia debacle, in which one young woman lost her life, had already taken place, but today's meeting on Boston Common by those defending the superiority of the white race had not yet taken place. Yet it was of course already casting its dark shadow as I read today's texts. And what immediately came to mind was the discrepancy between what these white racists are saying and what our scriptures readings for today say. For all three scripture readings have the same message: the human race is one and God's love and care extends to all 7 billion of us.

The first reading is taken from ch, 56 of the prophet Isaiah and it tells us that non-Jews will be allowed to enter the temple, a place previously restricted to Jews. They too will be allowed to offer sacrifice to the Lord there because "my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples."

In the second reading Paul is focusing on a theme which was very close to his heart. He was a Jew and he believed that God had

chosen the Jews as his special people. Yet the Jews, for the most part, had not accepted Jesus. And yet Paul believes that God's choice of them cannot be undone. It cannot be revoked. It is irrevocable. But if that is so, what is going on now since the majority of Jews did not accept Jesus? Paul's answer is that in time the Jews, seeing the Gentiles accepting Jesus, will be won over to accept him as well. There was, if you will, a detour, but only so that the Gentiles could be brought to faith. But then the road will be made straight again, but now as a road open to all.

And finally our Gospel, which too is a detour but in the end returns to the same road of openness to all.

Last Sunday our Gospel was the scene of Jesus coming to the disciples walking on the waves. They couldn't believe their eyes. They thought they were seeing a ghost. But the ghost reveals himself as Jesus: "It is I. Don't be afraid." But Peter is still unsure and then says: "If it is you, bid me come to you on the water...." And Jesus says: "Come!" Peter does but then loses heart and begins to sink and Jesus reaches out and grabs hold of him and then says to him, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?"

Today's Gospel is the exact opposite of last week's Gospel. That Gospel was a study in doubt; today's is a study in faith. And the faith is not that of a follower, of a fellow Jew, of a disciple, but of a foreigner, and not of a man, but of a woman. A woman, a non-Jew, is the one who has no doubts about Jesus and his divine power.

To me it is amazing that the Gospels are ---what would you say?--- so objective, so truthful. After all, they were written to inspire faith. We could say that they were written as Christian propaganda, as documents to bring people to belief in Jesus and to become his disciples and therefore members of his community. Therefore, we might expect them to "guild the lily," to make things look as good as possible. But they don't do that. They don't hide the faults and weaknesses, the squabbles and failings of the first members of the community. They tell about the doubts in faith that even the first disciples, the apostles, even Peter, the first of the first apostles, had.

And in today's Gospel they go even beyond that: they point to the limitations of the Lord Jesus himself. He was narrow, he was bigoted, he was Jewish and nothing else. He would not even talk to a woman who was begging him to heal her daughter afflicted by a

demon. Now how to put this man together with the man who was moved with pity—even in his gut—by the sight of crowds of people who seemed absolutely lost, like sheep without a shepherd, is difficult, to say the least. But, thank God, Jesus comes around before this scene is over. The woman's faith in him finally forces him out of his narrowness and he heals her daughter. At first he won't even speak to her. Then he insults her, calling her a dog. But the woman takes his insult and turns it to her advantage: Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from the table. And Jesus is conquered by her faith: "O woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish. And the woman's daughter was healed from that hour." And Jesus' cure, that is, his acceptance of this foreigner's faith was permanent, for at the end of this gospel, as he ascends to heaven, he says to his disciples: "Go, therefore, make disciples of all nations...."

How are we to conquer the hate of those who preach white racism? By believing that love is more powerful than hate. The 20th century French Jesuit geologist Teilhard de Chardin wrote these inspiring words: "Someday, after mastering the winds, the waves, the tides of gravity, we shall harness for God the energies of love, and then, for a second time in the history of the world, man will have discovered fire."

